

Cancer Does Not Stop for COVID!

“In recognition of Breast Cancer Awareness Month, Radiologists are urging screening centres across the British Columbia to maintain breast screening throughout the pandemic and are encouraging patients not to forgo their mammography exams”.

Vancouver, October 23, 2020 – Breast cancer is the second leading cause of cancer death among Canadian women. Although now more than ever people are surviving breast cancer, early detection through screening is vital.

Making healthy lifestyle choices can help reduce the risk, however, the reality is there are other factors such as family history that can impact the onset of cancer. For Canadian women this is especially true with breast cancer.

“One in eight women will develop breast cancer in their lifetime. Considering these odds, women should take an active role in their health, said Dr. Simon Bicknell, President of the British Columbia Radiological Society (BCRS), Breast Screening Radiologist, Lions Gate Hospital and North Shore Community Imaging Clinic. The Canadian Association of Radiologists (CAR), the Canadian Society of Breast Imaging (CSBI) and the BCRS recommend that women 40 and older have an annual screening exam. This can help with early detection of disease and improve overall patient outcomes.

During the first wave of the pandemic annual mammography exams were brought to a halt. Thousands of nonurgent procedures were postponed due to safety concerns, minimizing the further spread of COVID. “The world was not ready for the magnitude of this global health crisis. Fast forward six months later and, we are in a much better position to deal with the situation. Protocols are in place to keep patients safe, said Bicknell”.

Even before the pandemic outbreak wait times for medical imaging in Canada, inclusive of BC, far exceeded the acceptable 30- day standard. (Value of Radiology Report, Part II, 2019). Many patients who were waiting for breast examinations will now have to wait twice as long. “This is an issue for women 40 and older, especially those who are at risk for breast cancer. If BC were to scale back medical imaging procedures in this second wave, the consequences would be dire for women in this province, said Bicknell.”

Additionally, women with dense breasts seeking supplemental screening are facing up to a two-year wait time for a supplemental ultrasound assessment. According to Bicknell, “It was a positive message delivered in September 2018 when it was announced that women with dense breasts in BC would receive that information as part of their mammography screening report – a first in Canada.

Unfortunately, the demand for supplemental screening was not accounted for and wait times for a supplemental ultrasound assessment have grown dangerously long. According to Dense Breasts

Canada, having dense breasts has a greater cancer risk factor than family history. Further, the denser the breasts, the higher the risk of developing breast cancer.

Dr. Bicknell stressed the importance of patients showing up for their appointments. “When detected early there is a 98% survival rate for localized breast cancer. Patients can schedule a mammogram through self referral to a provincial screening program or through their family doctor.”

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